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00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:07,200

Nancy Mack is Professor of English where she teaches courses in composition

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00:00:07,200 --> 00:00:14,420

theory, memoir, and multi-genre writing. Her PhD is from Ohio State and she's taught

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00:00:14,420 --> 00:00:19,189

in a number of venues including high schools and correctional institutions

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00:00:19,189 --> 00:00:25,510

and at Wright State. [laughing] She won the College of Liberal Arts Teaching Award

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00:00:25,510 --> 00:00:31,789

in 2013. She is a prolific writer and conference presenter and during her

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00:00:31,789 --> 00:00:36,649

sabbatical, finished and published her third book, Engaging Writers with

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00:00:36,649 --> 00:00:42,809

Multi-Genre Research Projects. This book accompanied by a robust website, is the

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00:00:42,809 --> 00:00:47,030

culmination of many strategies for teaching writing she has developed in

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00:00:47,030 --> 00:00:52,210

her classroom. Her talk is entitled Working-Class Students Need to Write

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00:00:52,210 --> 00:00:53,520

About Their Lives.

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00:00:53,520 --> 00:00:55,120

Nancy.

12
00:00:55,120 --> 00:00:57,240
[Applause]

13
00:00:57,240 --> 00:01:06,700

14
00:01:06,700 --> 00:01:16,900
We'll see if I can get myself in it.

15
00:01:16,900 --> 00:01:26,220

16
00:01:26,220 --> 00:01:41,650
Tu-duh. I guess in my scholarship I kind of see myself as wearing two hats. I guess that's a metaphor that I've heard a lot here

17
00:01:41,650 --> 00:01:46,120
at Wright State with faculty members. We do many different things and I see myself

18
00:01:46,120 --> 00:01:51,450
as being on panels and doing scholarly things where they say "we need a

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00:01:51,450 --> 00:01:55,980
practitioner" you know, "can you do the practitioner part?" And then I see myself

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00:01:55,980 --> 00:02:01,620
being at practitioner gathering and I'm bringing the theory to the conversation.

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00:02:01,620 --> 00:02:08,700
So I try to push these two things closer together and in my talk I want to

22
00:02:08,700 --> 00:02:16,260
emphasize the word 'need' in having students write about their lives.

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00:02:16,260 --> 00:02:32,480

Alright, now I usually use.. oh okay. I've got to stop that I guess.
Yeah, alright. This is from a chapter that I will be having

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00:02:32,480 --> 00:02:42,220

coming out in a book about working-class
pedagogy and it used to be that we were

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00:02:42,220 --> 00:02:46,950

just concerned about getting students to
feel as if they were writers and now

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00:02:46,950 --> 00:02:51,670

we're realizing in composition
scholarship that we want to put academic

27

00:02:51,670 --> 00:02:58,060

in front of that and in fact, most
students when they are asked about their writing in

28

00:02:58,060 --> 00:03:02,800

an initial survey at the beginning of a
course -- What writing do you do? How do you

29

00:03:02,800 --> 00:03:08,230

feel about your writing? -- students make a
big divide between school writing and

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00:03:08,230 --> 00:03:13,060

out of school writing and many of them
have extremely positive feelings about

31

00:03:13,060 --> 00:03:19,050

their out of school righting. "Oh I write
poetry, oh I did a short story" and they

32

00:03:19,050 --> 00:03:22,989

feel very positive about it, but school
writing, particularly our working-class

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00:03:22,989 --> 00:03:28,640

students, they do not feel so positively about their writing. And as a writing

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00:03:28,640 --> 00:03:35,280
teacher I know that I'm asking students to assume a subordinate role in the

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00:03:35,280 --> 00:03:40,200
university, because the very language that they're used to using is not the

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00:03:40,200 --> 00:03:47,640
preferred language that academics use in all their work. And of course just one

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00:03:47,640 --> 00:03:54,730
little slip is the class marker and many of us know this academics with we've read

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00:03:54,730 --> 00:04:01,230
perhaps the proper name of a scholar, but we've never heard it pronounced. So that

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00:04:01,230 --> 00:04:05,410
when we go to deliver a paper at a conference we're very worried that we're

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00:04:05,410 --> 00:04:11,290
going to embarrass ourselves. I remember when I was here earlier on at Wright Stat,e

41

00:04:11,290 --> 00:04:16,859
I was working with Bakhtin's scholarship and a senior professor came into my

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00:04:16,859 --> 00:04:22,840
office and said "can you give me like some background on Bakhtin?" And kind of

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00:04:22,840 --> 00:04:27,500
that sounded like... and I thought it did he injured himself? I'm not sure what I'm

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00:04:27,500 --> 00:04:34,580
supposed to do here, but this
little embarrassment for us as academics

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00:04:34,580 --> 00:04:40,180
is magnified many times over for our
students who are working class and it

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00:04:40,180 --> 00:04:47,050
pushes them to silence and I found some
interesting studies that said that

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00:04:47,050 --> 00:04:54,710
students actually drop out of school for
this very reason and often more

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00:04:54,710 --> 00:05:00,789
working-class students drop out not
because of money or bad grades, but as

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00:05:00,789 --> 00:05:06,490
this feeling that their language skills
are inferior when it's not the case;

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00:05:06,490 --> 00:05:11,979
that they have self confidence, they
have achievements, but they have this

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00:05:11,979 --> 00:05:21,479
nagging fear and this leads to
alienation when they're here, but it also

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00:05:21,479 --> 00:05:26,960
influences their relationships as they
go on in school with their home culture.

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00:05:26,960 --> 00:05:33,960
So that they often feel, even the most
successful students who stay and succeed, feel

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00:05:33,960 --> 00:05:39,770
that there's always this discord between
their home and the University. And in a

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00:05:39,770 --> 00:05:45,960
recent study by Hearst, she found that
successful working-class students often

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00:05:45,960 --> 00:05:50,360
feel that they have to assume one of
three roles in relationship between

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00:05:50,360 --> 00:05:56,690
school and home, that they're loyalist,
perhaps the role I assume a lot when I'm

58
00:05:56,690 --> 00:06:01,470
talking about working-class, that I am
doing something for my home root or

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00:06:01,470 --> 00:06:06,810
their renegades who can never return
home and be comfortable, because they're

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00:06:06,810 --> 00:06:12,900
always the scholarship child who "oh has
those big fancy words" and "yeah you go

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00:06:12,900 --> 00:06:17,210
ahead and tell us" you know and that
everybody else in the family feels less

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00:06:17,210 --> 00:06:21,789
then or that they are torn, that they
have to go back and forth between these

63
00:06:21,789 --> 00:06:27,190
two universes and they have no home.
They're always feeling uncomfortable in

64
00:06:27,190 --> 00:06:33,479
one way or another and of course the key

word for me has been the imposter

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00:06:33,479 --> 00:06:39,270
syndrome and this is something that
whenever I talk about this at

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00:06:39,270 --> 00:06:46,699
conferences, academics usually come up to me later and say I feel just
like that, I

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00:06:46,700 --> 00:06:51,719
feel like I'm going to be exposed at some point and it's interesting,
this has also been

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00:06:51,719 --> 00:06:57,680
making social media more as one of those
top five things about the imposter

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00:06:57,680 --> 00:07:02,370
phenomenon and psychologists like to
call it a phenomenon

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00:07:02,370 --> 00:07:08,650
versus a syndrome as if perhaps you
know, that it's some dysfunction that you

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00:07:08,650 --> 00:07:14,129
should seek counseling for. But of course
as academics we know that it can lead to

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00:07:14,139 --> 00:07:21,440
procrastination, it could lead to over
committing oneself as a pleaser, "oh yes

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00:07:21,440 --> 00:07:27,350
I'd be happy to do that, I'll do that and
I'll do more than that" in order to feel

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00:07:27,350 --> 00:07:34,720
like maybe you might be successful. And I
relate this to writing, because it's all

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00:07:34,720 --> 00:07:40,400
about how you tell the story of your
life experiences and since our students

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00:07:40,400 --> 00:07:45,380
are coming here as working class and
they want to change their narrative -- they

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00:07:45,380 --> 00:07:50,539
may be first-generation college students --
this narrative is really very important

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00:07:50,539 --> 00:07:57,310
and if as is happening in the high
school classrooms and also in the

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00:07:57,310 --> 00:08:01,580
college classrooms, narratives are being
poo poed and pushed out by

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00:08:01,580 --> 00:08:07,550
argumentative writing, then when do
working-class students get to write

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00:08:07,550 --> 00:08:12,560
these narratives that are very important
to them. So in my classroom I have

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00:08:12,560 --> 00:08:17,960
experimented with this and found that if
I give them the prompt to focus on

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00:08:17,960 --> 00:08:24,990
language conflicts, that they're going to be
able to think through the conflicts that

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00:08:24,990 --> 00:08:30,400
maybe they will also endure here at the
university in relationship to their

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00:08:30,400 --> 00:08:36,839

language. And this is called of course
emotional labor, which it's wonderful now

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00:08:36,839 --> 00:08:44,770
that feminism let's academics talk about
emotion as rather it being some negative,

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00:08:44,770 --> 00:08:51,610
illogical, crazy thing that women bring
up all the time. And what we want is for

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00:08:51,610 --> 00:08:57,880
students to use critique to be able to
think about these emotional experiences

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00:08:57,880 --> 00:09:05,240
that are troubling for them and because
otherwise the narratives that they have to assume

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00:09:05,240 --> 00:09:10,089
are the ones that are manufactured
already by society and they will just

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00:09:10,089 --> 00:09:15,399
have to be that person who's never at
home, who is alien to their home culture,

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00:09:15,399 --> 00:09:21,180
and who never fits within the academic
environment. And I try to get students to

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00:09:21,180 --> 00:09:26,920
not just tell a story in their writing but to think about how they
want

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00:09:26,920 --> 00:09:30,620
to tell that story and what meaning they
want to

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00:09:30,620 --> 00:09:35,580
assign to their writing. So what do you
want the

96
00:09:35,580 --> 00:09:41,260
meaning to be of the writing that you're
doing? And one of the frames that I used

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00:09:41,260 --> 00:09:44,660
with them that really made a light
bulb go off

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00:09:44,660 --> 00:09:50,899
was for them to take their experience
and tell what they felt that experience

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00:09:50,899 --> 00:09:55,670
was like in the past, at that exact
moment that they were going through with

100
00:09:55,670 --> 00:10:00,130
maybe that younger age or the people
around them or that particular

101
00:10:00,130 --> 00:10:06,880
environment and then now, where you are
right now here at college. How do you

102
00:10:06,880 --> 00:10:12,829
look back on that differently than you
did at that particular time period and

103
00:10:12,829 --> 00:10:17,329
where you're going in the future, how are
you gonna look back on that experience

104
00:10:17,329 --> 00:10:24,160
then? And for my education majors this is
usually a very useful thing to do and

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00:10:24,160 --> 00:10:30,610
the analysis I have them do is not just
with time, but also with space. Did this

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00:10:30,610 --> 00:10:36,990
just happen to you alone, that experience
or in our culture did that happen to

107
00:10:36,990 --> 00:10:42,620
others? Would that happen in the same way and other cultures in
previous

108
00:10:42,620 --> 00:10:50,040
generations? Will the future generations
be as concerned about those things and

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00:10:50,040 --> 00:10:56,970
for a long time in composition
scholarship we focused on, well we want

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00:10:56,970 --> 00:11:02,209
to make these students into the perfect
academic and many of us have been

111
00:11:02,209 --> 00:11:07,290
accused of trying to make our students
into us. "Yes, you want to study what I have

112
00:11:07,290 --> 00:11:09,710
studied, you want be just like I am.

113
00:11:09,710 --> 00:11:15,490
But now we're understanding that that
may not be a realistic goal, that the

114
00:11:15,490 --> 00:11:20,920
students have to be a hybrid, they have
to be an academic, but perhaps of their

115
00:11:20,920 --> 00:11:28,860
own type. And so identity is something
that particularly with writing, we can't

116
00:11:28,860 --> 00:11:34,450
leave behind. It's an essential part of
writing that every piece that a student

117
00:11:34,450 --> 00:11:37,950
writes, they are enacting an identity

118
00:11:37,950 --> 00:11:45,700
a version of multiple identities they
inhabit in many different places. And

119
00:11:45,700 --> 00:11:53,310
getting that notion that identity is
fluid and multiple and can be revised

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00:11:53,310 --> 00:11:58,230
is really important for working-class
students who feel kind of stuck with

121
00:11:58,230 --> 00:12:05,200
different images that culture has
created. And for working class students

122
00:12:05,200 --> 00:12:10,180
when they finally get a handle on this,
they begin to realize that there are

123
00:12:10,180 --> 00:12:16,050
some positives about working-class
background and that you aren't just an

124
00:12:16,050 --> 00:12:21,190
individual who's doing something for
egotistical reasons, in many cases you

125
00:12:21,190 --> 00:12:25,920
are the first in your family, you're
representing your community, and for a

126
00:12:25,920 --> 00:12:31,850
lot of us as academics here at Wright State
it's fun to go to graduation to see

127
00:12:31,850 --> 00:12:37,560

those shining faces of the entire family
and that when that student's name is

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00:12:37,560 --> 00:12:46,170
read very quickly I might add, that
family is ready to bust out in applause

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00:12:46,170 --> 00:12:52,680
and yelling, because they are so proud of
their representative from their family.

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00:12:52,680 --> 00:12:59,990
And I think if we exclude narrative
writing from the classroom it makes it

131

00:12:59,990 --> 00:13:06,630
harder for our working-class students to
be there and their alien otherwise.

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00:13:06,630 --> 00:13:09,840
Everything that's brought to them they
have in no way

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00:13:09,840 --> 00:13:17,520
the ability to feel like they are
present in the classroom setting and of course

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00:13:17,520 --> 00:13:21,710
hopefully that's going to go on in their
future, that they're going to have lots of

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00:13:21,710 --> 00:13:28,630
those difficult situations, but they'll
be able to negotiate that emotional

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00:13:28,630 --> 00:13:34,000
labor that necessary when you're
bringing a different language forward.

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00:13:34,000 --> 00:13:39,560
And I found the concept of witnessing
to be very helpful recently in my

138
00:13:39,560 --> 00:13:46,340
scholarship, about how in some ways for
students this is about surviving and

139
00:13:46,340 --> 00:13:52,560
about making a mark and being heard. And
if you feel like nobody wants to hear

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00:13:52,560 --> 00:13:57,910
you of course, as several studies have
revealed, students feel like they should

141
00:13:57,910 --> 00:14:03,280
just leave, that nobody wants them here,
nobody wants to hear from them, that they

142
00:14:03,280 --> 00:14:10,210
are totally out of place here at the
university. And of course this fits many

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00:14:10,210 --> 00:14:15,710
categories besides just working class. It
fits English as a Second Language

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00:14:15,710 --> 00:14:18,190
Learners, it fits

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00:14:18,190 --> 00:14:25,930
students who are minorities in the
academic environment and it's like a

146
00:14:25,930 --> 00:14:31,950
first agenda that's most important, to be
able to feel at home here at the

147
00:14:31,950 --> 00:14:39,060
University and of course the emotional
labor that goes with their discomfort.

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00:14:39,060 --> 00:14:47,770

Some new scholarship in emotion doesn't talk about emotion as illogical, but as

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00:14:47,770 --> 00:14:53,800
something that we can critique and then we can revise and decide that we want to

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00:14:53,800 --> 00:15:00,340
feel a different way and take action to make those feelings come into

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00:15:00,340 --> 00:15:07,040
realization. And what I've always keyed on is that what students write needs

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00:15:07,040 --> 00:15:08,840
to be meaningful to them

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00:15:08,840 --> 00:15:15,500
or it's what has been called a dummy run. Otherwise it's just like a worksheet and

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00:15:15,500 --> 00:15:19,330
they're not really learning too much about writing when they don't even care

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00:15:19,330 --> 00:15:26,730
about their writing. So that brings me to the major product that came out

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00:15:26,730 --> 00:15:33,330
of my professional development leave, was my book and the practitioner part

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00:15:33,330 --> 00:15:39,030
of this is how that you can teach students to use academic sources by

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00:15:39,030 --> 00:15:45,830
first having them do primary research by interviewing family and friends and

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00:15:45,830 --> 00:15:51,920
community members about a topic of
interest that then you can marry along

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00:15:51,920 --> 00:15:56,650
with academic writing. And it's really
interesting because tonight when I teach,

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00:15:56,650 --> 00:16:02,430
we're gonna do the first academic search
for articles about their personal

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00:16:02,430 --> 00:16:08,720
experiences they're writing about. Last term I had three students here
at

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00:16:08,720 --> 00:16:14,290
Wright State who identified after a long
process of brainstorming and prewriting

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00:16:14,290 --> 00:16:18,200
and deciding what topics they wanted to
talk about from their life in their

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00:16:18,200 --> 00:16:23,480
community, I had three students who said
"what I want to write about is the fact

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00:16:23,480 --> 00:16:33,490
that my mother was an unwed, pregnant in
high school female and look I turned out

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00:16:33,490 --> 00:16:39,700
just fine and that's what I want to
research and write about" and tonight I

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00:16:39,700 --> 00:16:45,850
have a student who said "I want to write
about my parents getting a divorce" and I

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00:16:45,850 --> 00:16:49,430

said "oh you know, what do you want to write about that there's lots of things

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00:16:49,430 --> 00:16:53,790

that say how that affects people negatively?" He said "oh I only want to write about the

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00:16:53,790 --> 00:16:59,310

positive part of it, because look I'm here and I'm a positive result of their

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00:16:59,310 --> 00:17:06,340

divorce". And it's really exciting, I think, to see the kinds of things that students

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00:17:06,340 --> 00:17:10,100

write about. It's just made my teaching so much more joyous.

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00:17:10,100 --> 00:17:12,680

Thank you.

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00:17:12,680 --> 00:17:17,100

[applause]

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00:17:17,100 --> 00:17:17,880

Yes.

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00:17:17,880 --> 00:17:24,820

Nancy, it strikes me that StoryCorps is very akin to what you're trying to do. Did you ever bring that into a classroom and use that as an example?

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00:17:24,820 --> 00:17:30,160

David's been working some with StoryCorps. I agree with you, I think it's really

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00:17:30,160 --> 00:17:36,780

really important. I think that would be really exciting if I could do more audio

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00:17:36,820 --> 00:17:41,460
recording and things like that and video.
I think you're right. I think... and it's

181
00:17:41,460 --> 00:17:44,490
interesting that that didn't start of
the classroom

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00:17:44,490 --> 00:17:50,010
you know, it's an out in the community kind of initiative.

183
00:17:50,010 --> 00:18:00,850
The interesting thing about StoryCorps is that Dave Isay, the creator
of that series is more of a social worker than anything else. That's
the way they describe him.

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00:18:00,850 --> 00:18:08,340
Nancy, can you talk about your language conflict? I know that's kind
of towards the beginning, but it sets a foundation for a [inaudible].

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00:18:08,340 --> 00:18:15,500
Well I have a series of prompts that they examine different types of
things where language

186
00:18:15,510 --> 00:18:22,810
made them feel like an outsider or an
insider or that they spoke up in a

187
00:18:22,810 --> 00:18:28,400
situation for someone else or that they
spoke up for themselves or they didn't

188
00:18:28,400 --> 00:18:34,090
and wished they had. And by going through
a series of prompts like that they

189
00:18:34,090 --> 00:18:40,310
eventually find one that they really
want to examine. When I didn't do that,

190
00:18:40,310 --> 00:18:45,700
some of them would write about either

really horrible experiences or really

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00:18:45,700 --> 00:18:52,560

positive experiences and it kind of fell
into a formulaic kind of writing and by

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00:18:52,560 --> 00:18:57,540

kind of coming at it from a different angle
they have something they can explore

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00:18:57,540 --> 00:19:02,900

that they might not be too sure how they
feel about it and they wanted think that

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00:19:02,900 --> 00:19:06,400

through, which would be my goal. Katherine.

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00:19:06,400 --> 00:19:23,320

I was just thinking about the balance that teachers at a university
like Wright State, thus being a working class university, but at the
same time being a flagship of scholarship

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00:19:23,320 --> 00:19:32,320

and where do the doors creek open you know and it's not that easy,
because we are the institution.

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00:19:32,320 --> 00:19:32,920

Yeah.

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00:19:32,920 --> 00:19:38,140

These are the rules and theses are the objectives.

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00:19:38,140 --> 00:19:43,919

Yeah, I think you're speaking to something really interesting, which
is... and I had thought about this too much, but the

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00:19:43,919 --> 00:19:50,350

teachers conflict of how do I help this
student who really right now, we don't

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00:19:50,350 --> 00:19:56,179

need to talk about skill, we need to talk
about feeling comfortable and staying

202

00:19:56,180 --> 00:20:02,350

here, you know? That that's like job one and
yes we'll talk about subject verb

203

00:20:02,350 --> 00:20:08,129

agreement a little bit, but we need to
talk more about your not going home.

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00:20:08,129 --> 00:20:13,600

We want you to stay here and I want
you to come to class, you know [laughing] those

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00:20:13,600 --> 00:20:21,100

kinds of really important issues. Thank You

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00:20:21,100 --> 00:20:24,520

[applause]